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ABSTRACT

This collection of yoga asanas (exercises) can help relieve the pain of carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) and help prevent CTS among people who work on computer terminals. For maximum benefit, the exercises should be practiced daily or on as regular a schedule as possible. They are not intended to replace surgery or a physician's prescribed care. They are intended to be performed in an office environment. Bare feet are recommended. Advice about performing yoga asanas includes: adjust the asanas to one's natural abilities; if something hurts, stop doing it; challenge oneself, but respect one's limits; and keep a good supply of oxygen going into and coming out of the lungs. The exercises provided are tadasana; namaste, in front; namaste, behind the back; urdhva hastasana; half-garudasana; and uttanasana. Resources for obtaining more information about yoga and CTS are provided. (SM)

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yoga asanas

for the relief and prevention of carpal tunnel syndrome

Steve Beleu

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Yoga asanas can help relieve the pain of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS), and help prevent CTS among those of us who work on computer terminals. These asanas (exercises), being thousands of years old, have passed the test of time. They can help us deal with the pain and damage that we do to ourselves when we work with computer keyboards.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is an affliction of modern society. In the *Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses* of 1999, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that CTS caused 29,000 injuries during 1997. CTS in women accounted for 70% of all cases. More than half of all CTS cases required 25 or more days away from work. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Worker Health Chartbook*, 2000. Washington, Government Printing Office, 2000. pp. 119–120. Sudocs classification number: HE 20.7302:W 89)

Before beginning any exercise program of any kind, at any level, you should consult your doctor.

For maximum benefit you should practice these exercises daily. If not every day, then try to practice them as regularly as possible, or at least before any anticipated intense keyboard work. You should hold each asana only as long as it feels comfortable to you.

These exercises are not intended to replace surgery or a physician's prescribed care.

Practice the following asanas as a sequenced set of exercises. You will achieve maximum benefits from performing all of them in the sequence in which I present them. But if you need to change their order to match your needs and abilities, do so. I give the names of the asanas in Sanskrit.

The methods noted for accomplishing them are simplifications designed for non-Yoga practitioners. I will ask that you focus on only a few key actions in each asana.

Advice About Performing Yoga Asanas

- Adjust these yoga asanas to your natural abilities and what you can safely do.
- Remember that the expression "No Pain, No Gain" has "No Place" in yoga. It something hurts, stop doing it.
- Challenge yourself, but respect your limits.
- Keep a good supply of oxygen going into and coming out of your lungs.

  Your breathing rate should be between the shallow breathing that we normally do most of the time, and deep breathing. You should be breathing enough in and out to feel the air hit the back of your throat.

  You can check this by opening your mouth—if you not only feel, but also hear the air as it moves in and out, then you're breathing correctly.

  Unless you're suffering from a cold or an allergy you should breathe through your nose so that your breath circulates through your sinus passages.

  Remember that the main fuel you'll utilize to perform yoga isn't food, but oxygen. Breathing well oxygenates your blood.

Because these asanas are designed for use in an office environment, I am not going to ask that you wear loose fitting clothing and have bare feet. For a good, firm base, bare feet are recommended. Taking your shoes off is a minimum requirement.

1—TADASANA

Stand with your legs together, and the sides of your feet as closely together as they will go. Try to stand on your feet evenly, with the entire sole of each foot on the floor. Push your legs up to the ceiling from your heels to the tops of your legs. Then push your entire torso toward the ceiling. Roll your shoulders back, note what they feel like, and keep that feeling in them as you push your arms down toward the floor. Your legs and torso continue to push up toward the ceiling. This dual action helps you stand straight.

> **Key:** push your arms down at the same time that you push your legs and torso up. **Benefit:** this pose prepares you for the asanas that follow.

2—NAMASTE, IN FRONT

Begin in Tadasana, then press first the fingers, and then the palms of each hand together. Your hands should be in a "prayer" position, fingers pointing upward. Neither lift your elbows high, nor allow them to droop low, but put them into a middle position. Press palms and fingers into each other firmly, but not aggressively.

> **Key:** firmly press your palms into each other. **Benefit:** wrists.

3—NAMASTE, BEHIND BACK

Move your arms behind your back and attempt to move your hands back into a prayer position, fingers pointing upward. This will be more difficult with your arms behind your back. You may not be able to do more than touch the tips of one hand to the other. But as you become accustomed to this asana, begin to work the palms together. Press palms and fingers into each other firmly, but not aggressively.

> **Key:** pressing your fingertips together will eventually bring your palms together. **Benefit:** wrists—and shoulders.

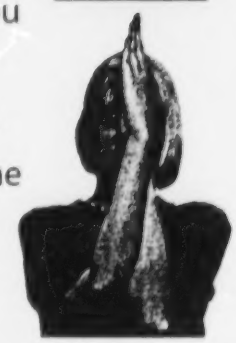
4—URDHVA HASTASANA

Release your hands and stretch your arms overhead. At first keep them parallel to each other, palms turned toward each other. Keep your eyes looking forward. Then begin to push your arms up to the ceiling, focusing on keeping them straight. As they push up, the hands will eventually begin to come together, and then the palms will come together. Your arms should be straight, with your palms touching.

Key: keep your arms straight as you push them up. **Benefit:** wrists—arms and shoulders, as well.

5—GARUDASANA
(actually a half-Garudasana)

Stand in Tadasana. Extend your right arm forward. Place your left arm over it, pushing the left arm to the right. Now rotate both arms clockwise. Bending the elbows, try to join your palms together. If you can't do this yet, try to clasp your hands together. Then lift your elbows as high as you can.



To do the other side, extend your left arm forward. Place your right arm over it, pushing the right arm to the left. Now rotate both arms counterclockwise. Bending the elbows, try to join your palms together. If you can't do this yet, try to clasp your hands together. Then lift your elbows as high as you can.

Key: rotate your arms as far as possible before you join your palms or clasp your hands together. **Benefit:** wrists and shoulders.

6—UTTANASANA

Stand in Tadasana. Lift your torso up off the base of the legs toward the ceiling, then push it forward. Your emphasis of movement should be forward, not down. Push your arms towards the floor. Your goals are to eventually: 1. touch your fingers on the floor; 2. place the entire palm of each hand on the floor; and 3. rotate your palms so that your fingers face backwards, palms on the floor. Whichever stage you are at, if any parts of your hands are on the floor, your arms should be pushing down as strongly as your legs are pushing up. This dual action helps you to stand straighter, and is good for your spine, your hands, and your wrists. If you can't reach the floor, touch your legs as far down as you can manage.

Key: if your fingers or hands are on the floor, push them down equally with the legs that you push up. **Benefit:** wrists, arms, and shoulders.

For questions or comments about these asanas, please contact Steve Beleu at 405-521-2502, or e-mail him at sbeleu@oltn.odl.state.ok.us
Suggestions for improving this guide are welcome.

For more information about yoga and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, please see:

Aschwanden, Christie. "Painful Wrists, Healing Poses." *Health* 15 (May 2001) p. 62. This is a commentary on the following Garfinkel article.

Garfinkel, Marian S., et al. "Yoga-Based Intervention for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome." *JAMA, The Journal of the American Medical Association 280* (November 11, 1998) p. 1601. This is an important article on yoga, published in a traditional medical journal.

Sequeira, Winston. "Yoga in Treatment of Carpal-Tunnel Syndrome." *Lancet 353* (Issue 9154) p. 689. This is also a commentary on the Garfinkel article.

For more information about yoga, go to—
Yoga Research and Education Center—A Gateway to Traditional Yoga
at http://yrec.org

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